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THE FAILURE OF CRITICAL REALISM

EX PEDE HERCULEM. A realism in which perception, as such, is incapable of ever apprehending material existents *qua* existents is—obviously—completely debarred from direct awareness of the physical Universe. It may, by means either of explicit arguments or of instinctive and irresistible belief, posit the reality of such a Universe; but only as a World with which the knower can never come into absolutely primal contact and direct relation. Thus the crucial test of realist epistemology is its treatment of the process and content of perception. All the later stages in the development of knowledge—thought, universals, mind—though of more vital importance to philosophy, are nevertheless very largely determined by the conclusions of the prior inquiry into perception. If then the content apprehended in and through perception is never under any circumstances ontologically identical with the material world, realism degenerates into Noumenalism.

This appears to me to be the logical outcome, on its own confession, of the noetic system developed in *Essays in Critical Realism*.¹ It concludes with a “lack of absolute certainty”—a lack not merely occasional but eternal; “what we contemplate is, in the case of perception, *appar-*

¹ Macmillan, 1920. For the sake of brevity I have treated the volume as one whole, without explicit reference to the various authors, except in the few cases in which purely individual opinions are advanced. It may be noted here that perception occupies a “fundamental position in any theory of knowledge,” (p. 97).

ently the very physical object itself.”² But—*semper, ubique et ab omnibus—only* apparently; for “this outer existent is not literally grasped; only its what, essence, character is grasped; our knowledge is obviously fallible”;³ and so far as perception, the root of knowledge, carries us, not only sometimes, but always, fallible. Perception is *la connaissance—la vérité—manquée*.

This result springs from a distinction which, in spite of some ambiguity, is presented by Professor Drake as fundamental—the distinction, *i. e.*, between “characteristics of objects” and “objects themselves.” “Characteristics appear to us; objects themselves,” on the other hand, “do not get within our consciousness; the physical existent itself does not get within experience; knowledge is a beholding of (its) what, its nature.”⁴ But since “objects themselves” are indubitably real—for otherwise ontological realism vanishes—and since further our instinctive belief in their reality is well founded—for if not, then epistemological realism vanishes also—“objects” and their “characteristics” must constitute, in virtue of their dual relation to consciousness, experience or knowledge, two separate categories. The existence of “objects themselves is private, incommunicable”;⁵ what is known is their characteristics, essence, nature.

This is the case if we take the passage as it stands; but if we compare it with page four, there is some self-contradiction. For (p. 24), “we directly perceive . . . the character of objects”; on the other hand (p. 4), “what we perceive . . . is the outer object itself.” Taking these two statements together, then, “objects” and “character of

² The word “object” bears a special meaning; *cf.* p. 213. I have therefore used “thing” or “existent” in referring to physical or material objects in the ordinary sense.

³ Pp. 32, 20.

⁴ Pp. 24, 29.

⁵ P. 24. *Cf.* p. 240: “The physical thing and the psychic state . . . are unquestionably two and mutually independent.” I may refer to a previous discussion of Dr. Strong’s theory in *The Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. XVI, p. 428.

objects" are, for perception, identical, and the distinction I have just referred to disappears completely. If, indeed, we confine ourselves, as the volume before us explicitly does, to the epistemological standpoint, it is difficult to conceive how any such distinction between objects and characteristics can ever arise. Unless the content of our knowledge of the world, however extensive and abstract it may in the end become, is based ultimately on the content perceived, it can arise in some way or other only from the activity of the mind; and when this possibility is excluded, noümenalism can be avoided only by identifying the perceived content ontologically, to some extent at least, with physical things themselves, which then become (again to some extent) one with their "characteristics."

"To some extent," that is; for this principle precludes neither the logical grading of the essentiality of the thing's characteristics, nor the ascription to it, for certain limited purposes, of attributes which are scarcely essential at all; as, *e. g.*, in poetry or metaphor or scientific hypothesis. But just as the issue of paper currency must repose on a gold reserve, so all such mental or knowledge processes must be based ultimately on an ontological core of reality directly perceived—a core or nucleus which is surprisingly small, but which is none the less indispensable; as, once more, a very restricted gold reserve would serve to maintain, under an ideal economic system, a disproportionately large credit system. If, on the other hand, perceived content is confined to characteristics which are always distinct from real things themselves, then the "gold reserve" of knowledge becomes wholly mythical, or it is at best locked up in an invulnerable safe the combination which is not only unknown but unknowable.

It is to this result that the epistemology of Critical Realism leads; for if we consider the main trend of the volume, the ambiguity referred to may be disregarded. There is

a universal, fundamental, distinction between "actual characteristics of objects" and "objects themselves"; it is no mere question of degree, of more or less, of extent and inclusiveness. The crucial passage in this respect occurs on page twenty-four: "So far as perception gives us accurate knowledge, it does so by causing the actual characteristics of objects to appear to us. The objects themselves . . . do not get within our consciousness." It becomes necessary therefore to examine the ground for asserting the real existence of objects, as distinct from their apparent, or perceived, or known, characteristics.

The assertion, we find, rests on an instinctive feeling or belief. "We instinctively feel these appearances to be the characters of real objects. . . . We may consider our instinctive and actually unescapable belief justified."⁶ This standpoint undoubtedly expresses a most important principle; but its true significance demands careful analysis. For there is a sense in which all our beliefs and philosophical conclusions are unescapable, and (from that point of view) instinctive. Whatever we really believe, we believe because, in the end, we can not help so doing; there is always some ground, logical or otherwise, which compels us to modify or abandon hitherto accepted conclusions; no one seriously adopts a new position except on grounds which—whatever their precise nature may be—he feels to be irresistible. But it is the peculiar task of philosophy to criticize such bases for belief; and having once undertaken this examination philosophy can not, *as philosophy*, rest finally upon any basis which is merely instinctive and nothing more. This does not mean that an instinctive belief is never satisfactory and must never be entertained; if that were the case life would at once lose many of its

⁶ I do not see how perception can be said, in any literal sense, to cause anything essential; the phraseology appears rather unfortunate.

⁷ P. 6. Cf. p. 195, "our instinctive assertion of" the physical world, which we "affirm through the pressure and suggestion of experience." See also note 11 below.

most precious elements; it simply implies that it is never satisfactory *philosophically*, and can never be accepted as a final *philosophic* deliverance. There is a whole universe of difference between an instinctive belief accepted purely as instinctive, and an instinctive belief for which some non-instinctive basis can be exhibited; the second may be philosophical, but the first can never be so.

Of this principle the varieties of belief in the real existence of physical things is an outstanding example. Everyone begins with a purely instinctive belief in their reality;⁸ but in the case of the "average man" or "naïve realist" this has become more or less rationalized, in so far as he bases his belief upon his "senses," which he means perception. And every form of Realism merely carries farther—it does not reject or subvert, as does, *e. g.*, subjectivism or solipsism—the critical analysis thus initiated in ordinary experience;⁹ no other course is indeed open to it, unless it rejects perception and its content *in toto*. For (to revert to our illustration) while the naïve realist far overestimates the amount of his gold reserve, so that much of what he accepts must be rejected as spurious or as impure, none the less must some minimum of precious metal be preserved intact as the ultimate basis of the whole system of knowledge. All Realisms, in other words, must rest finally—exactly as does naïve Realism—upon perception and its content¹⁰—upon a content more deeply criticized and more rigidly tested; and this analysis must be carried through to a final verdict. Either this content is—as naïve Realism regards it—itself ultimate physical reality, although the conditions governing both its reality and our knowledge of it are more truly defined; or it is not ultimate physical reality. If then this negative standpoint is adopted, two further alternatives arise. Either ultimate physical reality is

⁸ Cf. James, *Principles of Psychology*, Vol. II, p. 287.

⁹ Cf. "Critical realism . . . is a criticism of naïve realism." *Op. cit.*, p. 189; and p. 196.

never ontologically identical with the content of perception, and then—since there is no other mode of knowing it directly—this reality is *noümenal*; or we fall back once more—at the end as at the beginning—on an instinctive, but non-philosophical, belief in the known existence of physical reality. This in itself is never presented as the content of perception; in no other way is it possible for it to appear to us; and still we believe in its known existence instinctively—simply and solely, *i. e.*, because we can not help doing so.

This is the dilemma which faces, it seems to me, Critical Realism. If it maintains its universal distinction between physical things themselves beyond our consciousness, and their perceived or apparent characteristics, then (as I have argued throughout) it becomes a *noümenalism*. But if on the other hand it finds its affirmation of the known existence of physical reality on instinctive belief, then it forfeits all title to be regarded as a philosophic system, despite whatever other merits it may possess.¹¹ Or, if it still claims to be such, it can be at its best only a philosophy of the content of perception—this content being, confessedly, always distinct from ultimate physical reality itself.

It is true that the critical realist, despite this distinction, claims that perception is directly of things (or objects) and not merely of content. "He sees no reason why (the object of perception) should not be called the direct object" (p. 103). But in thus insisting on the directness of perception, it is only in precisely the same sense that memory, thought and conception are direct; in this respect these diverse processes or activities are all alike; "the principle is not different in perception." Such a standpoint, however, seems to rest upon a fundamental misinterpreta-

¹¹ Adopting the usual distinction between "perception" as a process and "percept" as content.

tion of the relation between these purely ideational processes and perception itself. For while these non-perceptual functions are undeniably direct, still their directness is in its nature far removed from the immediacy of perception, inasmuch as the former necessarily succeed and are based on the latter, and always, implicitly or explicitly, refer back to it for their own substantiation. They can not sustain a conflict with veridical perception, however remote and abstract may be the ideal content wherewith they supplement it. *If* perception is direct, then memory and thought—so far as they remain concerned with the same objects and are free from error—will be direct also. But their immediacy is the result or consequent of the prior immediacy of perception; it is wholly illogical therefore to adduce it as evidence for its own basis; the argument is obviously circular and assumes the very point at issue.

Ideation then always refers back to perception.¹² Its directness is really of a secondary order as compared with the primary immediacy of perception. What then of perception itself? Does it repose upon any cognitive function or activity more fundamental than itself? Naïve realism replies in the negative; for it perception, even when corrected and supplemented by memory, conception, and thoughts, find its ultimate guarantee in further perception and in that alone. The standpoint of the natural sciences, in their relation to physical reality, is the same. In the end, and so far as it is at all possible, science also appeals to observation and experiment—that is to perception characterized by the utmost delicacy and exactness. This principle is in no way contradicted by the use of scientific concepts. For these, when they transcend the abstractness of

¹¹ Historically, this standpoint closely resembles that of Stoic philosophy, which regarded some "phantasies"—the Greek equivalent of our sense-data—as creating an irresistible belief, not only in their own existence, but in that of their external objective causes.

¹² Cf. "Realism takes its start from perception. . . . I have dwelt upon perception because of its fundamental position in any theory of knowledge." *Op. cit.*, pp. 89, 97.

pure mathematics and logic, are derived, and indeed can only be derived, from the prior content of sense-perception. In this respect there has recently occurred a marked change in the attitude of scientific investigators. Molecules, atoms and electrons—perhaps even the aether—are no longer universally regarded as unreal abstractions or as mere “conceptual formulae of calculation.”¹³ Both in themselves and in their spatial arrangements they are now placed, by the physicists most closely concerned with the investigation of their properties, on the same footing and in the same existential category as the common objects of everyday experience. This holds true even of the recent developments in the physical theory of relativity, despite its extreme abstraction and abstruseness. “The conception simultaneous . . . does not exist for the physicist until he has the possibility of discovering whether or not it is fulfilled as an actual case . . . (until) he can decide by experiment”;¹⁴ that is again, from the standpoint of epistemology, by perception. This is the case then so far as naïve realism and physical science are concerned; while if we turn in the opposite direction and trace perception, as so many psychologists do, to some origin in mere sensational content the result is pure subjectivism—the very antithesis of all realism.

For naïve realism, further, this finality of perception is absolute—or very nearly so; and in this, of course, lies its patent defectiveness. *All* that it contains or reveals or yields to knowledge is, with but slight exception and qualification, ontologically and existentially identical with physical reality; even the modern physicist does not hesitate to assume that with sufficiently heightened powers of vision, either natural or artificial, what we should actually see would be the real molecule or atom itself. *Everything* cir-

¹³ Cf. Dr. A. N. Whitehead's recent volume, *The Concept of Nature*, Chaps. 1, 2; also *Nature*, Nov. 6, 1919, p. 230.

¹⁴ Einstein, *Theory of Relativity*, p. 22.

culates, we may say, in gold currency, except for a few spurious coins and the minimum of paper. But in this respect naïve realism is obviously far too sanguine; investigation quickly detects a large admixture of mere tokens and bank notes as it were; part of least of what perception yields is far from being the identical physical thing itself; naïve realism therefore must be supplanted by some more refined type of epistemological theory.

This leads us to what is, in my opinion, the radical defect of Critical Realism. Just as naïve realism is too absolute in one direction, so Critical Realism goes to too great an extreme in the other. It carries its critical process—in principle perfectly legitimate—altogether too far; so far indeed that it defeats its own aim and undermines its own basis. It saws away the branch which supports it and so falls headlong into noümenalism.

For *every* element which was identified by the naïve realist with physical reality now becomes sharply distinguished from that reality and is regarded as “content”—content which means or indicates or even reproduces physical reality,¹⁵ but which can never be, under any circumstances whatever, existentially identical with it. Of the perceived characteristics regarded originally as existentially inherent in the physical thing not a single one remains—they are all transferred to the category of datum or content, and are therefore wholly distinct from the thing itself. Every element, regarded as a physical quality of the material thing, is thus deprived of its existential physical status and becomes a datum. Every coin, in other words, tendered for examination by the naïve realist is degraded into a mere token. Certainly by its means his activities can go on quite as well as before; but neither singly nor in their totality are these tokens ever identical

¹⁵ “The content which we apprehend must have the property of reproducing something about the object, of conveying in its own medium the form of the object.” P. 218.

with the gold currency which he believed himself to be handling. He is, however, not a cent the poorer; his wealth remains there intact, to be just as readily used and computed, if he will but recognize that this can be done only by means of scrip instead of gold. He is given, in short, securities which are absolutely sound, but which are also absolutely irredeemable.

The insistence on the non-physical character of all perceptual content is indeed so emphatic as almost to amount to sheer subjectivism. It is, in the first place, "impossible to identify either the datum or the images . . . with the object. . . . The quality-group found in perception is not physical."¹⁶ And it is extremely interesting to trace the manner in which, as the development of Critical Realism proceeds, this merely negative description of the quality-group as non-physical imperceptibly changes into its definite and positive designation as subjective; so that the philosopher, in his dread of the Scylla of naïve realism, is inevitably overwhelmed in the Charybdis of subjectivism, from which he attempts to escape on a crazy raft of representationism.

The prominence thus attained by these subjective and representative elements in the entire system is sufficiently evident in the following passages; and if it be objected that these are isolated and severed from their context, the reply is that they are cumulative, and that nothing in the context qualifies their definiteness. We find then that "the content with which we automatically clothe these (physical) realities is subjective . . . Knowledge is the insight into the nature of the object that is made possible by the contents which reflect it in consciousness."¹⁷ Here is the dawn of representativeness—the object is reflected in consciousness; after which, *facilis descensus Averno*. For "what

¹⁶ P. 96.

¹⁷ Pp. 197, 200. Cf. p. 212, "the content is mental," and p. 240, "psychic state or sensation."

appear to us as physical things are in themselves of psychic nature," and "experience indicates an actual, causally-based agreement between the physical existent perceived and the content of perception. . . . The organism has perfected the agreement between the subjective datum and the object of perception";¹⁸ and thus the earlier metaphor of "reflection" has given place to a more definite and intelligible "agreement." Finally, and almost literally,

Last scene of all,
That ends this strange eventful history,
Is second childishness and mere oblivion,
Sans teeth, sans eyes, sans taste, sans everything.

For "the knower is confined to the (subjective) datum, and can never literally inspect the existent which he affirms and claims to know."¹⁹ How, in that case, he can ever cognize the "agreement" asserted must remain a mystery; "the situation is unique," continued Professor Sellars, whose position here is stated most explicitly: "*Internally, or in the percipient himself, we have the content of perception.*"²⁰

Thus it becomes perfectly clear that all the elements within his perceptual field which are regarded by the naïve realist as existential constituents of the physical thing, or evens as in their totality constituting that thing, become transferred, without any exception whatever, to the category of non-physical content—content which is, further, subjective, internal, and in one way or another representative or reproductive of the thing itself. This is, I think, an accurate summary of the argument thus far; and taking it as a whole, we are irresistibly reminded of the conclusion of the classic encounter between Alice and the Cheshire Cat. It will be recalled that the Cheshire Cat slowly faded away, till finally nothing remained within Alice's perceptual field

¹⁸ Pp. 202, 203, 240. Cf. p. 218, "the content must have the property of reproducing something about the object."

¹⁹ P. 203.

²⁰ P. 196: *italics mine.*

except its grin; and in precisely the same way does the physical thing lose all its perceived characters (as physical) so that they are all converted into subjective, internal, content; there is not even a grin left. "I have seen" said Alice, who was of course a naïve realist, "a cat without a grin, but never a grin without a cat." We are not told what become of the vanished animal; but if a critical realist had been present, he would have assured Alice not only that the cat still existed, but also—what is here the fundamental point—that she still continued to perceive it exactly as before! For the conversion into content in no degree interferes with perception; it is rather the means by which it is effected. "I perceive" maintains Professor Sellars, "concrete *things* . . . co-real with the percipient, and independent of him in exactly the same way and to the same degree that they are independent of one another. . . . Thinghood and perception go together";²¹ and as we have seen already, Professor Pratt insists that perception remains direct.

The terminology here is of fundamental importance. It is not that we know things,²² or believe in their existence, or assume them. It is true that, in a phrase reminiscent of Hegel, "we are compelled to think the object",²³ but this is only in the sense that things are perceived by the critical realist to the same degree and with the same actuality of details—though not in the same manner—as by the naïve realist. It is the essence of Critical Realism that, whatever be the true theory of perception, there is absolutely no difference whatever between what the critical realist actually perceives and what the naïve realist perceives—of course excluding, in both instances alike, ordinary error and illusion. The *result* in each case is precisely the same, for each perceives real physical things.²⁴

²¹ Pp. 196, 197.

²² On p. 205 we find "I know an object." I consider this later.

²³ P. 198.

²⁴ Or objects; the distinction is immaterial here.

That is the essence of the claim to be perceptual realism; the only difference being that one understands how it occurs, while the other altogether misinterprets the true character of the processes involved.

It seems to me, however, that the two principles which in conjunction form the basis of Critical Realism—that is the subjectivity or internality of all perceptual content, and the physical nature (in the sense of naïve realism) of the things or objects perceived—can not logically be held at the same time; the maintenance of either necessarily involves the abandonment of the other. If all the physical qualities of the naïve realist are truly mere character complexes which constitute subjective content, then *physical things* can not be perceived, although they may possibly be known, or postulated, or believed in—this would depend on the meaning given to these terms. On the other hand, if physical things are perceived—again in the sense of naïve realism—then some concessions must be made to its standpoint as a serious theory of knowledge. Its “qualities” must be, to some degree at least, not merely representative or reproductive or reflective of the thing, but ontologically identical with it.

For if, as Critical Realism contends, *all* the content involved is, and always has been, subjective, then, although there certainly might have been realists of some type or another, there could never have been any naïve realists in the world at all; and since critical realism is confessedly a development from the primary naïve form, there could have been no critical realists either. In other words, those problems which actually confront epistemology would never have arisen. For those problems originate in the contrast which is set up by naïve realism between objective and subjective, externality and internality, matter and mind, or whatever other terms express this dichotomy. It rests upon certain deliverances of perceptive experience;

it can indeed have no other possible basis, since, as we have seen repeatedly, perception is accepted as foundational of knowledge. But if now the whole content of perception is subjective, it would have been impossible for this contrast, in its actual form, ever to have been in any way established, simply because there would have been nothing whatever in the universe of perception to suggest it to the experient—it would have had no perceptive basis actually, and it could not conceivably have acquired any other. It cannot be argued that it arises from the spatiality of the universe; for all the character traits of perceived space, like those of every other perceived object, are (by the critico-realist hypothesis) themselves subjective. Universal subjectivity of the basal elements of experience, in short, would render impossible (actually) and inconceivable (theoretically) that contrast between objective and subjective which has, as a matter of fact, actually occurred in the evolution of knowledge; for naïve realism, despite all its defects, is after all one marked stage in that evolution.²⁵

This conclusion appears to me to vitiate the entire critico-realist standpoint; and further considerations may be advanced in its support. It may be argued that the mere practical demands of individual life and of mutual intercourse necessitate that category of physical objectivity which the realist—either naïvely or critically—employs; but I do not think this need necessarily be the case at all. It can make no difference, for low types of conscious experience, whether the “world” is all subjective or all objective; life would proceed equally well in either case, since neither category can have any significance for the experi-

²⁵ On account of its fundamental importance in epistemology I may be permitted to refer to a prior consideration of the subject, from a different point of view, in *Mind*, vol. xxvii, p. 304. Cf. “We mean independent objects and we interpret these objects in terms of ideas.” (P. 194.) My contention may be put in the form that if these “independent objects” are physical, no notion of them could ever have arisen.

ent; while theoretically to regard all the content at that stage as subjective is a gratuitous assumption. In the opposite direction we find that when mind reaches its highest levels the mathematician, the abstract thinker, the poet and artist, perhaps even the true mystic, live in and efficiently react to a realm which wholly lacks physical objectivity. All that is theoretically necessary then for such efficient reaction is the selection—consciously or otherwise—of certain elements out of the whole which serve as types, quite irrespective of *physical* objectivity and subjectivity, and which other elements then represent or reflect. The symbols of the mathematician may be cited as one instance of this general procedure.

This naturally leads to the representative function which, as earlier quotations have shown, is assigned by critical realism to subjective perceptual content. Professor Drake accepts—but only provisionally—the well-known distinction between primary and secondary qualities; and this raises a dilemma already familiar in one form or another. The desk (pp. 23, 24), “really is oblong, but not in itself black, except in the sense that it has characteristics which cause the character-trait black to appear to us.” If then the characteristics which cause the trait black to appear are themselves black, as (it would seem) other allied characteristics are oblong, where is the necessity for the trait at all? It is wholly gratuitous to lay down *a priori limits* to what lies within the capacity of the mind to perceive; and it seems sheer superfluity to require a black content whereby to perceive a black object whose blackness is similar to that of the content. But on the other hand, if the object’s characteristic is not black, in the same way as the content is black, then what is it? Obviously, we can not tell; our ignorance is complete and final, for we can neither perceive nor conceive its quality or nature;

which means that the thing is, to that degree, a *noumenon* and perception a pure misnomer.

But, as a matter of fact, critical realism does assert *a priori* limits to the capacity of perception. "What," asks Professor Sellars, "is the fundamental postulate of knowledge? It is the cognitive value of the idea."²⁶ But this principle, when thus advanced as the basis of a theory of perception, plainly commits realism in advance to complete dependence upon subjective ideas; it postulates an epistemology resting at bottom on ideas—in other words, it begs the main issue from the very outset. The sole fundamental postulate of epistemology is, not the cognitive value of ideas, but the cognitive value of knowledge itself. And this is not the mere tautology that, at first sight, it may appear to be; it means that knowledge, whatever be the precise character of its contributory processes, is always knowledge of reality. Some ideas most certainly have cognitive value; it may indeed prove to be true that nothing has cognitive value except ideas. But such a principle can be adopted only at the conclusion of the inquiry, as a logically established result; it can not be advanced at the outset, as a fundamental postulate. To do so is merely to base realism firstly on that radically defective sensationalistic tradition which vitiates so much current psychology, and which it should be the first task of realism to criticise and confute; and secondly on a misinterpretation—for which, however, some historic justification may be pleaded—of the true meaning of "idea."

In conclusion then it seems to me that realism must make substantial concessions to the naïve realist and—though not of course uncritically—adopt more generally his practical standpoint. At *some* levels of experience the content of perceived physical reality must be identical and consubstantial with the content of experience, and this

²⁶ P. 198.

without the mediation of any subjective or internal content of any type whatever in any kind of representative or reflective or reproductive capacity. It may easily prove to be the case that the volume of the content in question is, relatively to the whole, very small; but there is an infinity of difference between very little and none at all. We know that in the living organism a minute proportion of certain ions or of vitamines makes all the difference between life and death; and similarly some minimum of physical reality, perceived directly, not merely in the critico-realist sense, but independently of the critical realist's subjective and representative perceptual content, plays an analogous part in realistic epistemology.

A final remark on terminology may not be out of place here. Modes of consciousness vary correlatively with the content; and it seems to me to lead to some confusion if we speak of "knowing" a physical object or thing. Epistemology is, in its own way, a science; and quite apart from any theory of perception, I would suggest that scientific precision requires us to say that we "perceive" physical things; that is, the sole type of consciousness relevant to them is perception, with its subsidiary aspects of sensation and apperception. It will be admitted that we can neither imagine nor conceive existing physical objects, because these functions lack proper sensational content; and this is equally true of knowledge as such. What we "know" is a truth or principle, fact or judgment. Perception is certainly implicit judgment, and knowledge consists in rendering explicit what is there implicit. But still there is an essential difference between implicit and explicit; and to ignore this—to say that we "know" or "think" the object—appears to involve a serious confusion of perfectly distinct categories.

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